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As the author of "the comprehensive biography" of the Maronite nun he mentions (with a misprint) in his article footnote 2 ,[1] I read Prof. Nabil Matar article on "Christian Mysticism in the Ottoman Empire: The Case of Hindiyya the Nun, 1720 – 1798" (*The Muslim World*, vol. 95, April 2005), with the utmost interest.

Unfortunately, Prof. Nabil Matar's piece cannot be considered a contribution to scholarship. He neither really uses, nor discusses, the historiography of the subject. He refers almost exclusively to Bulus Mas'ad & Nasib Wuhayba Al-Khazin (edit.), *Al-Usul al-tarikhiyya*, Achkouth (Lebanon), T.1, s.d., 671 p.; T.2, s.d., 670 p.; T.3, 1958, 662 p. (omitting the surname of the second editor, Al-Khazin), which is a collection, or rather a selection, of documents, with an obviously apologetic purpose (see, for instance, the commentaries on Hindiyya's mysticism, vol. 2, p. 440). These volumes do not allow a full reconstruction of Hindiyya's life or of the context of the affair. Nabil Matar's narrative often sounds like an abstract of my book, but he never acknowledges his debt. Although I do not blame him for that, there are several points at which he would have been better advised to read my work more carefully.

Various affirmations are incorrect. For instance, on p. 2, he mentions "an account of her early childhood and development", which must be the famous "*Sirr al-itthâd*", and he gives the date of May 1779 for the dictation of this account. This is a very late date, which does not correspond to the facts. The convent of St John in Hrasheh (p. 2), which she entered in 1747, was not Melkite, but Maronite, under the Maronite Bishop Germanos Saqr.

Nabil Matar's is a somewhat simplistic interpretation of the "Hindiyya case". On pp. 1 / 2, his assertion that "Hindiyya represents the first reaction of Middle Eastern Catholics, the Maronites and the Uniates with Rome, against the overbearing authority of the Pope" proves his ignorance of the context and of the developments of the relationship between the Maronites, the Melkites and Rome since the 16th century. Speaking about the letters to Rome of the priest Sharabâtî from Aleppo, he seems to be unaware of the links between this opponent of Hindiyya and the French Jesuits of the city [2]. Ironically enough, he describes the foundation of the Maryamite Order in the 19th century as the fruit of the "seed" planted by

[1] Bernard Heyberger, *Hindiyya, mystique et criminelle, 1720 – 1798,* Paris, Aubier, 2001, 456 p.
[2] *Hindiyya, mystique et criminelle,* op. cit., p. 114 -115.

Hindiyya, although it was her "enemies", the Jesuits, who were the actual founders of the Order. Nor does he realise that the "seed" of Hindiyya caused a scandal in Aleppo in the first half of the 19th century, with other female mystics following in her wake[3].

I can agree with Nabil Matar when he asserts that "There was enough space for her as a Christian among the Ottomans to live her spiritual life fully: her difficulties arose not from Ottoman attempts to curb or crush Christian mysticism…" But I should point out that the young mystic was unable to remain in the Islamic city of Aleppo, where it was impossible to found a Christian monastery, and that she emigrated to Lebanon against her will. We should understand the freedom of religious life in Mount Lebanon in the specific context of the demographic composition and the social and political system of the country in the 18th century. Communalism, at the time, did not have the importance it only assumed in the following century [4]. Druze Shaykhs and Sunni Emirs of the Shihabi family interfered in the Hindiyya case, as allies or adversaries of the Maronite Shaykhs Khazin or other Maronite notables. On at least one occasion, the Patriarch Istfan called for the protection of the famous Ottoman Pasha of Acre, Ahmad Al-Djazzar[5].

On the other hand, I do not believe in a "cross-religious spirituality" in Hindiyya's case. Features of her mysticism, like "the knowledge of the ignorant" and "relinquishing the self in the presence of God" are very common, and as typical of Western Catholic spirituality as of Muslim mysticism. In her case, it is much more likely that she followed Western patterns of spirituality rather than Muslim ones. So she can hardly be the representative of a struggle "to define themselves [the Maronites] not only in terms of the Christian tradition of Rome, but also the Maronite legacy of the East and the cultural world of Ottoman Islam.[6]"

Nabil Matar's main thesis is that Hindiyya was the victim of a Roman conspiracy to "use the Maronite Church as a Trojan horse for the penetration of the Levant". This is a very common assertion by the Maronites, and by the sources Matar follows, like Ma'sad and Al-

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[3] *Hindiyya, mystique et criminelle,* op. cit., p. 315 – 318. See also Bernard Heyberger, « Entre Orient et Occident. La religion des dévotes d'Alep », Louis Châtellier (édit.), *Religions en transition dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle*, Voltaire Foundation, « Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century », Oxford, 2000, p. 171 – 185.

[4] See Richard Van Leeuwen, *Notables and Clergy in Mount Lebenon. The Khazin Sheikhs and the Maronite Church (1736 – 1840)*, Leiden, Brill, 1994, quoted by Matar footnote 4, and Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism. Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon*, U. of Califonria Press, 2000.

5 *Hindiyya, mystique et criminelle*, op. cit., p. 280 – 289.

[6] On this topic, see the interpretation of Bruce Masters [2001], *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World. The Roots of Sectarianism*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 76, and my critic of this interpretation, Bernard Heyberger, « Pour une « histoire croisée » de l'occidentalisation et de la confessionnalisation chez les chrétiens du Proche-Orient », *The MIT-Electronic Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, autumn 2003, p. 36 – 49.

Khâzin, or Bulus ʻAbbud al-Ghustawi ("Paul Abboud Gostaoui", footnote 27). The author gives credence to this anti-Roman prejudice, and this induces him to make mistakes. Quoting a document published by Masʻad & Khazin, he writes that Hindiyya "became so renowned for her piety that Pere [sic] Venturi received a letter in July, 1746 asking him to invoke her to pray for a monastic community". But he does not realise that this community, and *the ra'is al-'am* of this monks (*ha'ula'u al-ruhban al-afadil*), was actually François de Retz, the General of the Jesuits himself. At the time the General supported Hindiyya, an exemplary disciple of the Society of Jesus to which her brother Nicolas had been admitted in 1741[7]. Later, Matar describes Mikha'il Al-Khazin as "the pro-Jesuit Patriarch" in 1782, even though the Jesuit Order had been officially dissolved by the Pope on 16 August 1773.

The Roman Church of the 18th Century was hardly a monolithic institution, with no internal contradictions or conflicts. And "the penetration of the Levant" was not always the aim of the head of the Church when decisions were taken relating to Hindiyya and the Maronites. For example, the condemnation of the rules of Hindiyya's Order of the Sacred Heart by Benedict XIII (1753) corresponds first and foremost to the Pope's general preoccupation with female mysticism and female monastic discipline. The pattern of the mystical union with God, attended by visions, raptures, stigmata, which Hindiyya claimed to follow, remained suspect in the eyes of the Roman theologians of the time. And the spread of the new devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Catholic world was considered with misgivings by the Pope and his entourage.

This first condemnation actually had few consequences for Hindiyya and her Order of the Sacred Heart, since she had the full support of the majority of the Maronites, and even of the Druzes and the Melkites. "The persecutions and tortures" she underwent 25 years later had other reasons. Nabil Matar, like the authors he follows, and like Avril M. Makhlouf whom he quotes in footnote 26, says nothing about the real causes of the second Roman inquiry and condemnation of Hindiyya and the dissolution of her Order.

Nabil Matar shares a common tendency to speak about the "Maronites" as a united, homogenous, timeless community. However, like all other human groups the Maronites had their internal contradictions, conflicts and developments. Mikhail Fadel who, in 1750, wrote a long panegyric of Hindiyya quoted by the author, later became the leader of the mystic's opponents and the challenger of her supporter, the Patriach Yusuf Istfan. In the Order of the

[7] *Hindiyya, mystique et criminelle*, op. cit., p. 45, 104, 111.

Maronite Monks, which spread at the same time, dissent between "Baladis" and "Aleppines" led to long and violent struggles.

The convent of Bkirki headed by Hindiyya also became a battle ground for these different factions. And, before she herself suffered "persecution and torture", the Mother Superior inflicted physical and moral hardships on the sisters of her convent for many long years. Hindiyya, claiming to be united bodily and spiritually to her heavenly husband Jesus, abandoned the elementary rules of morality and religion without the authorities having any objective control over her or her convent. At least one nun, Nasima Badran, was beaten to death. The Roman Archives have the overwhelming testimony of her sister, Warda Badran, but the Maronite editors of Roman documents such as those quoted by Matar never published this particular piece of evidence. Although the French traveller Volney referred to the murder in his report as early as 1787 [8], silence was imposed on this aspect of the life of Hindiyya and her monastery of Bkirki. These deeds should, however, be revealed and discussed, not with the malicious intent of discrediting or harming the Maronites, but simply in order to establish the truth, and to help us understand the social and cultural context of Mount Lebanon in the 18th century and of Catholicism in the East.

The story of the mystic Hindiyya is undoubtedly connected with the confrontation between "East" and "West", but this confrontation cannot be understood in a simplistic, dualistic light. To interpret Hindiyya we need to "connect" different histories, to have a good knowledge of Lebanese society and the Maronite Church and community, as well as of the internal developments of western Catholicism[9].

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8 Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Egypte pendant les années 1783, 1784, 1785*, Nouvelle édition, Paris, 1959, p. 223 – 225. First edition : Paris, Volland & Desenne, 1787.

[9] Bernard Heyberger, « Pour une « histoire croisée » de l'occidentalisation et de la confessionnalisation chez les chrétiens du Proche-Orient », *art. cit.*

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